ROHANTA AND NANDRIYA

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MOST OF US have heard of the Buddha, whom millions of people all over the world revere as one of the kindest and wisest teachers of mankind.

The word Buddha is not a name. It means a person who has become enlightened; that is, one who has understood the meaning of life, and thought deeply about how men should live in order to gain peace and happiness. The Buddha's real name was Siddhartha. He was a prince who lived about 2500 years ago.

One dark night, he left his palace and for many years wandered all over the land. It was not because he did not love his home, his parents, his wife and child that he left

them thus. But he saw so much unhappiness around him that he could not rest till he had found some means of removing it.

Flowers open with the dawn and the dew-drops on them sparkle like diamonds in the sunlight. But by sunset, the flowers wither. Tree after tree bursts into blossom in spring. But summer and autumn follow and the trees are bare of leaf and bloom. Children grow into young men and women and life is full of adventure and delight. But old age cannot be held back and in the end men, and indeed all living things, pass away.

Perhaps this is the way of the world, and there is no point in being sad about it. But can't we try to be happy, content and kind to one another as long as we live? It appears that men are unable to do this. There is a lot of unhappiness in the world, mainly because men hate one another for no reason or for silly reasons. If only they were less selfish, they would be able to get on well with one another and the world would be a joyous place.

The Prince yearned to find a way of making men unselfish and kindly. He knew that if he stayed in his palace with its ease and comforts, he would never be able to do this.

The night he left his home, he looked again and again at his wife and their little baby-boy who were sleeping on a bed strewn with jasmines and other flowers. The thought

of parting with his little son caused him great sorrow and he felt he would not be able to leave unless he took the baby with him. But even in her sleep, the mother was embracing the little one, protecting him with her hand. The Prince said to himself, "If I move aside the Princess's hand, she is sure to wake up and I will never be able to go away. After my wanderings, when I have discovered the means of removing the misery of mankind, I will come back to see my son."

After many years of wandering and meditation, the Prince found that the answer to the problem of making people's lives happy and peaceful had already been given to him on the night of his departure. He had seen the mother's hand protecting the child even in sleep, but he had not understood its meaning then. He realised it now and said, "As a mother protects her son, so let everyone love and protect anything that has life." If each being could care for other beings as the mother cares for her children, the world of grown-ups would become as joyous

as a kindergarten of happy children. As the Buddhá, or the Enlightened One, he showed great kindness to all living things, and when he passed away, men remembered his compassion.

You know the popular belief of every religion that men who do good deeds go to heaven and live there happily for ever. But the legend gained currency that the Buddha did not want to enjoy heaven when generation after generation of living things—both animals and men—continued to be born and they all needed his help in their difficulties and pain. Therefore, the legend went on to say, he had come to the earth in many rebirths to help his brethren, even before he had been born as Prince Siddhartha. A great number of stories became popular which told how he was born as an animal or man in different lands and at different epochs to help those in distress. Each story was called a *Jataka* (birth) since it gave an account of one such birth of the Buddha. In course of time, all these stories came to be written down in the Pali language. This was the language spoken in Magadha (Bihar) in the old days, and also the language of the early Buddhist scriptures.

The Pali Jataka collection has over 500 stories. They form a great treasure. Firstly, they are beautiful tales; they were translated and expanded from Pali into Sanskrit. Secondly, the sculptors of ancient India retold the stories in carvings at great Buddhist centres like Sanchi, Bharhut and Amaravati. Thirdly, the painters also recreated the stories in line and colour—almost all these stories are illustrated in the paintings of the Ajanta Caves.

We give you two stories here: Rohanta, the black buck, and Nandriya, the monkey. When you read of their kindness and self-sacrifice, you will have no doubt that they were indeed the compassionate Buddha who had come to the world again and again to make it a happier and kindlier place.

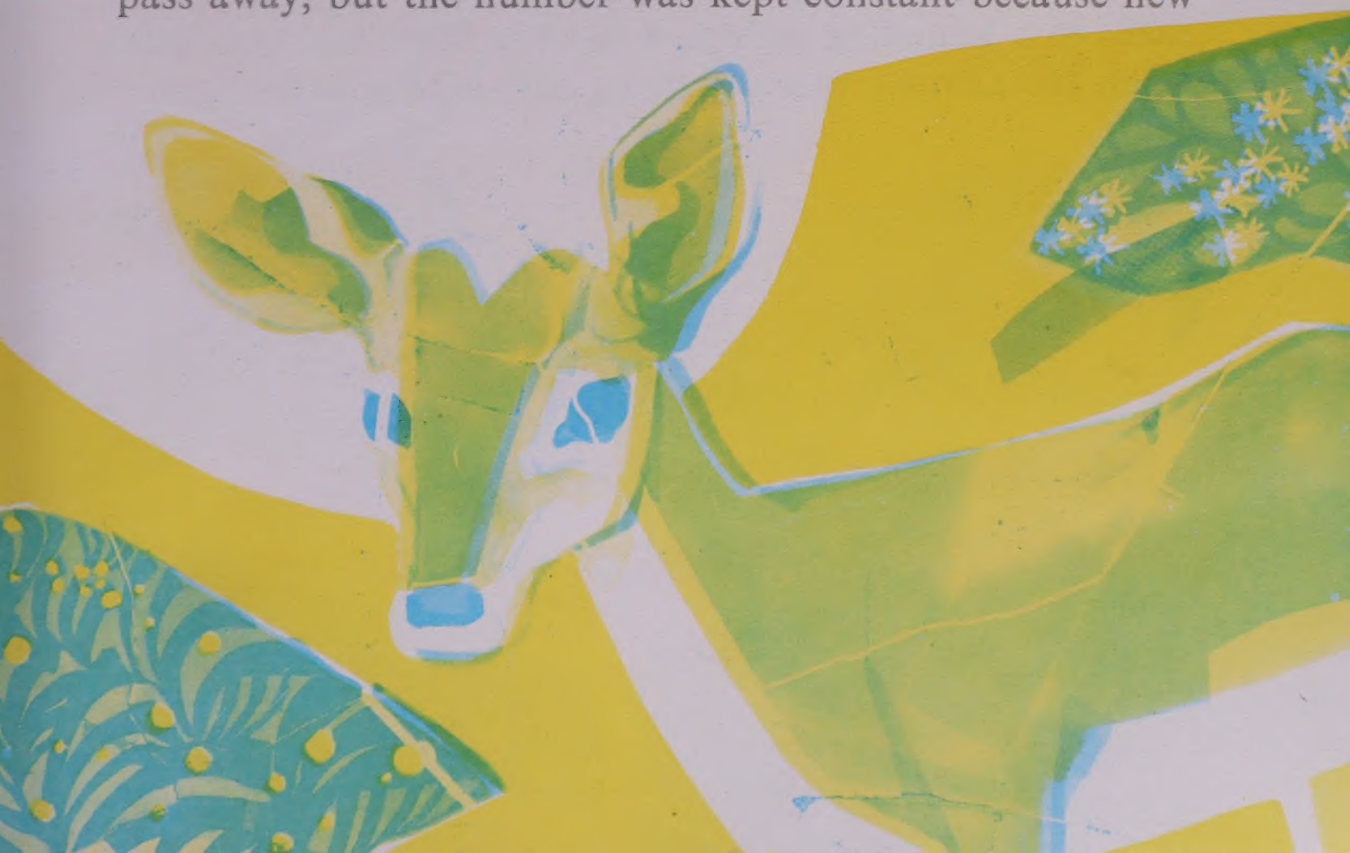
ROHANTA, THE BLACK BUCK

A long, long time ago, a black buck was born in a plain adjoining a forest in Uttar Pradesh. His parents named him Rohanta.

Have you ever seen a black buck? It is perhaps the most beautiful of all antelopes. In the wild state it is found only in India. The full-grown male has a rich black coat with a white underneath and strikingly lovely spiralled antlers which give it a very handsome appearance. The doe is smaller and hornless but is equally graceful. Its colour is a yellowish fawn.

Rohanta too was fawn-coloured when young. But at the age of three his coat began to turn a rich black. His parents were delighted because this change indicated that their son could now look after himself.

Rohanta and his parents lived in a herd consisting of about 100 deer. Every year some of the old bucks would pass away, but the number was kept constant because new



fawns would be born. The mother doe gave birth to only one or two babies at a time, whom she concealed in the tall grass for a while. They gained strength quickly and soon joined the herd.

Rohanta grew to be an intelligent youngster and rapidly picked up the way of life of the herd. The herd fed on grass and, if there was any cultivation at the edge of the forests, they sometimes went into the fields and ate the cereal crops. They entered open forests with wide expanses of grass and when threatened hid amidst the cover provided by the tall grass. They grazed till almost noon and again in the late afternoon, lying down and resting during the hot hours of the day. Their sense of hearing and smell was only moderate; keen eyesight and speed were their protection. Over long distances, the black buck is one of the fastest animals in the world and can keep up a speed of more than 65 kilometres an hour. Starting with high jumps it rises, more or less vertically, several metres into the air for the first few leaps, and then takes to a bounding gallop. A herd in flight is a wonderful sight, the animals virtually flying past with effortless grace

One incident that took place when Rohanta was very young indicated his intelligence. Wild mango trees sometimes grew in the forests. Ripe mangoes nibbled by birds often lay on the ground beneath the trees and in the case of low branches, the deer could reach the fruit by raising themselves on their hind legs. A hunter used to come regularly to this forest. Whenever he found the tracks of a buck near a tree, he built a small platform high up, covered it cleverly with leaves and lay in wait. When a deer came near, he struck it down by throwing a spear. He made a living by selling the meat and skin of these animals.

One day, Rohanta discovered a tree with low branches laden with ripe mangoes. Being a healthy youngster he had a good appetite. He had his fill. But there were plenty of mangoes still left and he decided to come again the following day.

After he had left, the hunter happened to pass by. He saw the fresh tracks left by Rohanta. He built a platform on the tree and went home. The following day, after having an early breakfast, he hastened to the forest, climbed up the tree and lay in wait, his spear ready by his side. For a long time nothing happened. Then to his joy he saw a young buck coming towards the tree. It was Rohanta.

But if the hunter knew the tracks made by a deer, Rohanta too was able to detect a hunter's tracks. Though the hunter had been cautious, he had left one or two footprints. Looking up, Rohanta also had a feeling that the foliage of the tree appeared as if it had been disturbed. He sensed danger and stopped a short distance from the tree.

The excited hunter waited impatiently for the deer to draw near. When Rohanta did not budge, he plucked a ripe mango from the tree and threw it in such a way that after falling on the ground it rolled towards Rohanta. He hoped that the sight of the ripe mango would tempt the young buck to come closer to get more fruit.

When the mango rolled towards him, Rohanta felt certain that some tricky business was afoot. This time he looked very carefully at the leaves, especially where they seemed to be somewhat different from the previous day. At first he could not see anything that spelt danger. But, luckily for him, a slight breeze blew through the wood and rustled the leaves of the tree. The breeze lasted only a few seconds but this was enough, for he got a fleeting glimpse of the hunter.

He did not show by any sign that he had caught sight of his enemy but called out, "My good tree, till now you have been in the habit of letting your fruit fall straight to the ground. But today you are throwing your fruit like stones at me. This means that you no longer like me. Therefore, I shall go away and look for another tree which will give me a more friendly welcome!"

The hunter realised that the impudent young buck was mocking him, got very annoyed, and threw his spear at him. But Rohanta had stepped beyond the reach of the spear, which fell harmlessly on the ground. To annoy the hunter further, the plucky young deer took hold of the spear between his teeth and made off with it.

On another occasion, Rohanta did not have such an easy escape. He was roaming through the woods when he was caught in a snare that had been set by a tribesman. For a moment he panicked. Then, with a great effort, he overcame his fear and began to think calmly of a means of escape. After some time he had an idea. He did not struggle at all, for he knew that the more he struggled, the more the snare would tighten and the more helpless he would be. He pawed the ground near his hoofs and scattered the grass and earth all around. Then he lay down at full length on his side, with his legs stretched out, taut and rigid. He closed his eyes, let his head fall sideways, lolled out his tongue and let it drool so that his whole body became wet and messy. This attracted a lot of flies which settled on his body in swarms. Some crows also flew down and sat on his still body.

It was a long wait. Late in the afternoon, the tribesman came to check how things had fared. From a distance he saw the deer caught in the snare and got very excited. But when he drew near, he found that things were not too good. Crows were sitting on the still body of the buck. Flies were swarming all over the place. The ground had been all pawed up as if in the death-struggle of the animal. He drew

near and smacked the deer on the flank. The deer showed no sign of life. "I am unlucky," the hunter muttered to himself. "He must have been caught early this morning and died because he struggled and so tightened the noose around his neck. He is going bad already. By the time I take him home, the meat will be inedible. I will cut him up here itself, eat some of the meat and take the rest home with me." He undid the snare, let the animal lie there and went to gather sticks and leaves to make a fire. As soon as he was at a safe distance, Rohanta rose to his feet, shook himself, stretched out his neck and sped like an arrow back to his herd.

As he grew up, such incidents made Rohanta realise that though it was wonderful to be alive, life could be full of dangers too. It would not always be possible to meet them alone. One needed friends who could help in difficulties and whom one could help in turn.

In the forest near the plain of tall grass where Rohanta lived, a woodpecker had built its nest on the top of a tall tree. Near where the woodpecker lived, there was a very small pool in which lived a tortoise. Some distance away

there was a big lake and it was here that the herd came to drink water in the evenings. But Rohanta preferred the forest pool because he could meet and gossip with the tortoise. The woodpecker also used to fly down and join them. The three thus became great friends.

One day, a hunter passed that way and noticed Rohanta's footprints going down to the pool. The hunter had been there some weeks earlier, but at that time there was no sign of any forest animal coming down to this pool to take water. He realised that now a deer was visiting it fairly regularly and so, setting a trap of leather thongs, he went on his way. The tortoise was resting at the bottom of the pool and did not see the hunter setting the trap.

Late in the evening, Rohanta went down to the pool and was caught in the noose. His cries immediately brought his friends there. The tortoise climbed up to the bank and the woodpecker flew down and perched on a stone. The

woodpecker said to the tortoise, "Friend, you have strong teeth. Bite through this snare. The leather cord seems very strong, so it may take you a long time, a whole day perhaps. Meanwhile, let me see what I can do about stopping the hunter from coming here before your work is finished."

The woodpecker flew to the hunter's hut which was some distance away, in the open ground at the edge of the forest. It waited there all night, perched on a tree in the front courtyard of the hut. At break of dawn, the hunter came out, knife in hand. As soon as the woodpecker saw him, it flew at his face squawking loudly, beat the hunter with its wings and soiled him with its droppings. The hunter was superstitious and believed in omens. To get soiled by bird-droppings just as he was setting out for his day's work seemed to him to be a very bad omen indeed. So he decided not to go out in the forenoon.

In the late afternoon, he decided to set out once again and peeped through the window of the hut to see if the bird was gone. But the woodpecker was very much there and it saw the man peeping out. The hunter thought that he would foil this nuisance of a bird by leaving the hut from the back door. But the woodpecker was clever and it guessed exactly what the man was going to do. So when the hunter left from the back door, the woodpecker was ready for him. It flew at the hunter again, beating at his face with its wings, pecking him with its beak and soiling him with its droppings. But this time the hunter lost his temper. He

beat off the bird and tried to catch it so that he could strangle it. The woodpecker realised that now it was dangerous to fight with the hunter. So it flew to a tree and perched there, watching what the man would do next. In a terrible temper, the hunter decided that, good omen or bad, he would set out for the forest pool. When the woodpecker saw him striding forth angrily, it knew that there was no point in tarrying any longer and flew back as fast as it could to warn its friends.

The tortoise had gnawed through all the thongs except for one tough cord. Its teeth looked as though they would fall out and its mouth was all smeared with blood. When the woodpecker flew in and said that the hunter was on his way, the tortoise worked harder though its jaws and teeth were aching. When Rohanta saw the hunter running up, knife in hand, he pulled with all his strength. Just when the hunter was ten paces away, the thong snapped and the buck fled into the woods. The woodpecker flew to the top of a tree. But the tortoise, who had worked all night and the whole day, fainted with weakness and lay where it was.

The hunter, who was terribly annoyed, picked up the tortoise, threw it into a bag and tied the bag to the low branch of a tree. Looking back over his shoulder while he was fleeing, Rohanta saw this and stopped so abruptly in his tracks that he nearly fell. He could not thus leave his friend who had worked so hard to save him. He thought out a plan quickly. He pretended to

stumble, picked himself up, walked a few steps slowly as if in pain and stumbled again. The hunter saw this and was convinced that the deer was so tired that he would not be able to run fast. So he seized his knife and set off in pursuit. Rohanta pretended to stumble all the time, but he kept just out of reach and thus led the hunter deep into the forest. When he saw that they had come a fair distance, he gave the hunter the slip and ran back as swiftly as the wind by another route. He lifted the bag with his horns, threw it on the ground, ripped it open and let the tortoise out. The tortoise thankfully disappeared back into the pool.

Thus the years went by and Rohanta grew from a youngster into an elder of the herd. And when the old buck, who had been the leader of the herd, died, all the deer in the group accepted Rohanta as their new leader.

None of them suspected that serious trouble was brewing for the herd.

The old King of Banaras, in whose domain lay the plain and forest where the herd lived, passed away and his son, who became the new King, was passionately fond of hunting. This not only spelt danger to the animals but also caused great hardship to his people. For the King ordered all of them, townsfolk and countryfolk alike, to accompany him, surround the area where he hunted, beat the bushes to round up the deer and then he would shoot them down with his bow and arrow. And since the young King went hunting almost every day, the people found it difficult to attend to their work and earn their livelihood.

Some elders among the citizens, therefore, called a meeting to consider what could be done to solve this problem. The King's palace stood in the middle of spacious level grounds. An old man suggested a plan. "Let us fence in these extensive grounds. We will then grow fine grass and dig a few pools so that large herds of deer can live

here and get all the grass and water they need. Then we will all go out and round up the deer and bring them here. The deer will then be living close at hand and the King can hunt them whenever he likes without bothering us."

Everyone agreed that this was a good idea. They went to the King who gladly consented to the plan. Enthused by the thought that their troubles would shortly be over, the people planted grass and trees and dug pools in the grounds. The place soon became a very beautiful park. When it had been completely fenced, almost the entire town set out for the woods, surrounded them and beat the trees, bushes and ground with their sticks till they drove the deer out of their lairs and into the open. Then they beat drums and shouted and created such a din that the

animals became panicky and were driven into the park. When all the animals were inside the fencing, the townsfolk closed the gate and went and told the King that he could now hunt all day long if he liked, without having to ask the people to drop their work and accompany him to the countryside.

Two separate herds of black deer had been rounded up. One was the herd of which Rohanta was the leader. The leader of the other herd was Hiran. He too was a capable veteran. But, unlike Rohanta, he ruled his herd more by discipline than by affection. When the King inspected the deer, he noticed these two leaders, found that they were the most magnificent bucks he had ever seen, and passed orders that no one should ever harm either of them.

The young King went hunting almost every day. He was proud of his skill as an archer and gave the animals a sporting chance by allowing them to get away to a fair distance as fast as they could before he took aim. He also stopped hunting for the day when he had bagged one deer.

But the moment this terrible archer appeared in the park, the animals got panicky and ran pell-mell. The result was that several deer got seriously wounded before one was finally brought down by the King and the hunt ended for the day.

Since this was creating needless suffering, Rohanta told

Hiran, "Friend, ours is indeed an unfortunate lot. For one of our members death is a certainty every day. But all living things are fated to die sooner or later and even when we were living in the forests, we could not always escape hunters, tribesmen, farmers and wild animals that preyed upon us. But it is a great pity that while one of us is doomed to die every day, many others get wounded and have to suffer great pain."

"This is indeed a pity," said Hiran. "But there seems to be nothing we can do about it."

"No, there is a way out," said Rohanta. "Let us draw lots every day. The deer on which the lot falls should offer itself for the King's hunt. The lots can be drawn for members of my herd one day, and for the members of your herd the next day. In this way, the other deer will escape injury." Hiran readily agreed.

Though the King was excessively fond of hunting, he wanted only one deer a day, and he too was unhappy when many others got wounded needlessly. Therefore, he too agreed with this proposal. But he did not like the idea that an animal should come to him every day as if he were

a mere butcher. He added an outer fencing to his park so that between the old and new fences there was a path like a race-track that circled the whole park. He marked off one place on the track as the starting-point and put a gate here in the inner fencing. The deer upon whom the lot fell would enter the race-track through the inner gate. The King would be waiting at the starting-point, mounted on a horse. The deer would get a good start and then the King would follow and try to shoot it down with his bow and arrow.

The King also agreed that if the deer could make one complete round of the track and return to the starting-point without being hit, it would be spared and would not have to offer itself for the hunt till the lot fell upon it in the next round. But the King was such a good archer that a deer never escaped him. And the animal on whom the lot fell knew that it would never see the dawn of another day. This was a pity. Still, it was much better than in the old days when the whole herd got into a panic when the King appeared, and for every deer that got killed, half a dozen were seriously wounded.

One day, the lot fell upon a doe who was an expectant mother. The doe thought, "If I get killed today, my little fawn will never be born; it will get killed along with me. If only I can get a few days' grace till my fawn arrives, I would not mind dying in the least." This doe belonged to the herd led by Hiran. So it appealed to him to postpone its turn for a few days. Hiran could understand its feelings but he said, "This is certainly unfortunate. I can't pass your turn on to someone else. Everyone loves life and wants to live as long as he possibly can. It would be very unfair if I ordered some other deer to go in your place

today."

The poor doe could see the justice of the leader's words. It felt that there was no hope, but wanted to try one last chance. It went to the leader of the other herd, Rohanta, to see whether he could give it any advice. Rohanta listened patiently and he too agreed that Hiran was right: it would be unfair if Hiran asked some other deer to go in place of the doe.

He added, however, "You need not go till your fawn is born."

"But how will you manage today?" asked the doe.

"I shall manage somehow. You need not worry at all."

When the King arrived for the hunt that day, he was astonished to find that Rohanta had presented himself on the hunting track.

"My friend," said the King, "you know my orders were that no one should hurt either you or Hiran, the leader of the other herd. You should not have included your name when drawing the lots. I will not disobey my own orders. You can go back and send another deer."

Rohanta told him about the doe and said, "It would certainly have been unjust if Hiran or I had ordered another deer to take the doe's place. But I am not doing that. I am offering myself instead."

The King was so moved by this that for a long time he kept silent. Then he said, "There shall be no hunt today. I want to talk to you again. Meet me in the evening."

When Rohanta met him in the evening, the King said, "I have decided to spare the life of both of you. Neither the doe nor you shall come to any harm."

"Why have you taken this decision?" asked Rohanta.

"Why!" replied the King. "It would be very unkind and cruel if I killed that poor doe or a noble-hearted deer like you."

"Sire!" said Rohanta. "Don't you think all the animals of the herd deserve similar kindness from you?"

The King thought for a long while and then took a great decision. "From today onwards I will give up deer-hunting. This park shall become a sanctuary. In the forests and even in the plains, no one shall hunt deer unless herds ravage the crops of farmers."

It was thus that sanctuaries—or *abhayaranyas* as they were called—were established all over India in the old days. But as the years passed, we forgot our tradition of affectionate regard for our animal brethren. And no animal in India has suffered more at the cruel hands of man than the black buck which has been shot by the hundred. But today we have realised the results of our harshness and so the black buck has been declared a protected animal all over India.

NANDRIYA

THE MONKEY KING

NANDRIYA, THE MONKEY KING

Once upon a time, a baby monkey was born in a troop that lived in a wooded area of Madhya Pradesh. His parents named him Nandriya.

He grew to be a kind-hearted youngster, but he was adventurous and liked to explore the woods on his own. His parents told him that till he was older and more mature, he should always stay with the troop and not go wandering about alone lest he meet with some danger. He would heed their advice for some days. Then the spirit of adventure would come upon him again and he would stray from his troop, though he always returned when the day ended and the sun was about to set.

On one such occasion, Nandriya leapt from tree to tree and travelled so far from the heart of the woods where the troop lived that he reached the edge of the forest. He then saw that the wood was bounded by a stream. In the middle of the stream was an island and Nandriya saw to his great delight that growing on the island were mango trees, laden with ripe fruit.

He wanted to get to the island, but the stream was too wide. Even if it had been dry, it would have taken a strong young monkey like him at least two leaps to cross over. As it was, the stream was in spate after recent rains. It appeared to be deep and the current was strong.

Disappointed, Nandriya was about to turn away and return to his troop when he saw something black visible above the level of the water about half-way between the bank and the island. He looked closer and found that it was the top of a huge rock. The water swirled around it and broke into milk-white foam. Not much of the rock

rose above the water, but Nandriya felt that there was just enough space for him to land in a flying leap and to take off for a second leap that would take him to the island. It looked dangerous, but Nandriya was a plucky youngster and, undeterred, he managed to land on the island.

He had never tasted mangoes of such sweetness an flavour as the ones he found in abundance on the island. The youngster ate so many of them that when he wanted to go home, he found that he could not move as his stomach was full and his body felt twice as heavy as before. He had to wait an hour before he could do the leap. And even

then, he fell slightly short of the rock and was only able to save himself by splashing about in the water and clutching at a ledge of the rock before the strong current could pull him away. He clambered up the rock and sat there for a while, getting back his breath. The water was very cold and he got thoroughly wet. "I will never be so greedy again," Nandriya told himself. "I shall only eat enough to satisfy my hunger." When he had regained his breath and dried himself in the late afternoon sun, he jumped from the rock to the shore and went back to his troop.

With great excitement, he told his parents and the other monkeys of the troop about the island abounding in the sweetest mangoes on earth. But youngsters in their excitement tend to exaggerate everything and live in a world of fantasy, so older people scarcely ever take them seriously. The members of the troop thought that Nandriya was either telling a lot of fibs or trying to pull their leg. When the youngster invited one and all to his island, they replied, "No, thank you. You can eat all those wonderful mangoes yourself."

That was just what Nandriya did in the days that followed.

He had discovered the island during the beginning of the rains. As the season advanced and the rains became heavier and more frequent, he found that the level of the water in the stream was rising and the portion of the rock which rose above the water was becoming smaller and smaller. He then realised that he would have to keep watching the rock carefully. The day it entirely disappeared from sight, he would be cut off from the island and it might be weeks before the flood subsided and the rock

again rose out of the water.

At a bend upstream, there lived a monstrously large crocodile. From where it lay, it saw Nandriya jumping across daily to the island in the early forenoon and jumping back and going home in the late afternoon. The greedy crocodile was very fond of monkey-flesh and it made up its mind that it would somehow manage to eat Nandriya. Nandriya had not seen the crocodile and the crocodile lay low because it knew that if the young monkey caught sight of it, he might get frightened and never visit the place again.

The water in the stream continued to rise and one day when Nandriya came down to the bank, he found that only a tiny portion of the rock could be seen above the swirling, foaming current. He wondered whether he should risk a leap. But he had made the jump so many times that he knew that he would be able to land safely even on this small portion of the rock and take another jump from there. He realised, however, that this was the last day. He would not be able to visit the island from then onwards till the rainy season was over and the water had subsided.

He spent more time than usual on the island since he would not be visiting the place for a few days or even some weeks. Then he noticed that it was getting late and he hurried to the place on the bank of the island from where he usually jumped back to the rock. The sun had sunk below the top of the trees and the stream now lay in shadow, though it usually sparkled in the sun when he ·rned at his usual hour.

He was just about to jump when he suddenly stopped short. The rock did not look all right to him. Earlier, only a tiny portion of it was visible above the water. Now it seemed to have grown as big as it used to be at the beginning of the rainy season.

Nandriya sensed danger. From a distance and in the dusk it did look like the rock, but the level of the water in the stream could not have come down so quickly. He made certain of this by looking at the level below the ledge on the bank of the island from where he used to jump. The water level had not fallen. Nandriya was sure that some monster of the river was trying to trap him. He tried a trick.

He shouted as if he were addressing the rock, "Hullo, my friend! I am back." Naturally, there was no reply. Then he called out in an aggrieved tone, "Friend rock, how is it that you won't speak to me today?"

"Oh!" thought the crocodile, "So the rock is in the habit of talking to the monkey. I must answer for the rock today." Accordingly it shouted, "Sorry friend, I was sleeping and didn't hear you at first."

Nandriya now realised that what had looked like the rock was in fact a huge crocodile which was mostly in water but had its long head and part of its body on the rock. He called out, "You are not my friend, the rock! You are a crocodile! What do you want?"

Very annoyed because it had been tricked into revealing itself, the crocodile replied angrily, "I want to eat you."

As there was no other way back, Nandriya's only choice was to outwit the crocodile. So he called out, "Since I have no alternative, I am going to give myself to you. I am going to jump. Open your mouth wide to catch me. You had better close your eyes. Otherwise I may blind you by

mistake if I land heavily on your head instead of straight into your mouth."

The stupid crocodile opened its mouth wide and closed its eyes tight. Nandriya was nervous at first, but mustering his courage he jumped in such a way that he landed on the back of the crocodile as far behind the open jaws as he could manage. On landing, he used the back of the animal, which was as hard as a rock, for a kick-off and in a flying leap landed safely on the bank and scrambled up a tree. "I don't feel like being eaten today," he called out mockingly. "Why don't you try to eat your own tail, you fathead?"

Several seasons went by, the leader of the troop died and Nandriya, who had impressed everyone with his pluck and intelligence, was elected the new leader.

The place where the troop was living did not have many fruit trees. Nandriya, therefore, felt that they should all move to the island of mango trees. The old monkeys still did not believe that the island would be as good as Nandriya claimed. But the young monkeys liked the idea of going to a new place.

The dry season had set in by the time the troop decided to move. In one way this helped them, for the stream was almost dry and many rocks rose above the fallen water level. By jumping from rock to rock, even baby monkeys could cross the stream without difficulty. When they reached the island, even the old monkeys who had so many misgivings agreed that it was a wonderful place.

But serious trouble was brewing for them.

As the dry season advanced and it became hotter and hotter, throats became parched and the troop went down to the stream to drink more often. But the stream was fast drying up. Instead of one continuous stream full-flowing in its bed, it broke up into pools. Soon the pools became puddles of muddy, stagnant water. Later, even these puddles began to dry up, one by one. When no more water was available in the familiar place where they had crossed over, the troop explored the bank to find out

whether there was any water upstream. They came across a bend in the river. Here the bank fell steeply and at one place formed a large pool which still had a lot of water.

The young monkeys who had discovered the pool were overjoyed and were about to rush down to the water to drink when one of them cried out, "Halt !" The others asked what the matter was. Without saying a word, the monkey pointed to the soft, wet ground at the edge of the pool. Many footprints of small animals such as rabbits and hedgehogs could be seen. But all the prints led down to the pool. There were no prints of these animals leaving the pool after drinking. Something was evidently wrong and so the monkeys decided to report the matter to Nandriya.

Nandriya came and, after studying the footprints, closely scanned the pool. Reeds that looked like small bamboos or cane grew all along the edge of the pool. When he looked very carefully, he saw the long head and snout of his old enemy, the crocodile, who was craftily lying in wait among the reeds.

The crocodile realised that it had been discovered. Since there was no sense in trying to hide any more, it called out, "All of you monkeys are going to die, one way or another. I eat all the animals that come down to drink and I am going to eat all of you. If you don't drink, you will die of thirst, for there won't be any water except in my pool for another two months till the rains start."

For a long while Nandriya did not know what to do. In the meantime, the monkeys, especially the baby monkeys, were nearly dying of thirst. Then a wonderful idea suddenly struck Nandriya.

"Spread out along the bank away from the crocodile," he told the troop, "and pull out a few long reeds." He also pulled out a reed, bit off its tender, growing end and blew down it. But it had a knot a few centimetres down. He tried another reed. Here the knot was a long way

down. He broke the reed just above the knot and blew down it. The air came out from the other end with nothing to block it in between. Leaving the place where the crocodile was lying in wait, Nandriya stood as far back from the bank as the length of the reed permitted, and, dipping one end of it in the water, he sucked at the other end. The water came up and cooled his parched throat. He called out to the other monkeys to try the same method of quenching their thirst.

The angry crocodile tried to get at some of the impertinent little monkeys who were making faces at it mockingly. But it was a fat, heavy animal and could not move fast. By the time it reached a particular spot, the monkey there had finished drinking and had climbed up a tree. Once or twice the crocodile bit the reeds and pulled them away angrily. But the monkeys sprinted away to other places on the bank and sipped the water with fresh reeds. The stupid crocodile splashed around chasing the monkeys, but very soon got tired and lay like a log, glaring at them in helpless fury.

Two months later the rains came and the monkeys did not have to go down to this pool as the stream filled up and they could drink anywhere along the bank.

Most of the mango trees were clustered in the centi of the island, away from the bank. But there was one tree which grew right at the edge of the stream, on the side of the island which faced away from the rock and towards the opposite bank. One of its top branches was long and almost extended to the other bank. It was a withered branch with no leaves or fruit. However, another young branch was beginning to sprout below it. It had lots of leaves, and when the flowering season came, it was heavy with blossom.

Nandriya felt that, if this branch bore fruit, it could spell danger for the troop. For some of the ripe fruit might fall into the water and float downstream. The stream probably joined some big river which had villages and townships along its banks. If the mangoes fell into the hands of men, they would surely come in search of the grove and they would drive away the troop.

So he asked the monkeys to eat any fruit that grew on this branch as soon as it was the size of a small berry. The

monkeys followed his advice diligently.

But near the tip of the branch there was a big ants' nest; beyond it, and concealed by it, a mango began steadily to grow in size and ripen. The monkeys did not venture to the tip of the branch because of the ants and the mango was not visible from the land-side.

When it was ripe, the mango fell into the stream, drifted with the current, reached the river and chanced to float down to the private bathing *ghat* of the King, whose palace was on the bank of the river. The fruit was still fresh. The King ate it and found that he had never tasted a mango of such sweetness and with such a delightful flavour.

The excited King decided that he would not rest till

he had found the mango grove where such delicious fruit grew. Accompanied by a band of archers, he set out in a boat. They rowed upstream till they came to the stream that joined the river and decided to explore its banks. And thus at last they reached the island of mango trees.

The King found the island full of monkeys. He wanted to hunt them there and then. But by this time it was getting dark. So he told his archers, "Stand guard by the trees which have the largest number of mangoes. See that no monkey steals fruit tonight. Tomorrow, as soon as it is daylight, we shall drive away the whole lot."

A young monkey, who had hidden itself among the foliage of the tree under which the King was seated, overheard this and noiselessly leapt from tree to tree till it reached the corner of the island where Nandriya rested at night. The monkey reported the whole matter and asked in despair, "What shall we do? Tomorrow we shall all be hounded out of here. Some of us may even be injured or killed."

Nandriya thought over the problem for a long while d then said, "I think there is a way to escape. Go and

spread word that everyone should assemble within an hour near the tree with the withered branch, on the opposite side of the island."

The stream was in full flood as the rainy season was far advanced. The rock, which the monkeys had used for hopping across from the bank when they first came to the island, was covered by many metres of water. So escape by that route was impossible. Nandriya, therefore, went to the opposite side, climbed the lone tree there, and cautiously moved along its withered branch that stretched towards the other bank. When he reached the tip, he estimated the remaining distance and felt that he could probably cover it. He jumped and landed safely on the branch of a tree on the other bank. Then he calculated the length of his leap, got down and pulled out a slender but strong bamboo of about the same length

which was, in fact, the longest he could find. He climbed up the tree on which he had landed and tied one end of the bamboo securely to the tip of a branch that grew towards the stream. Then, very cautiously, he climbed up the bamboo. This was very difficult as the bamboo was slender and slippery. But he managed it, and when he reached the tip, he tied it securely to his waist. He then began to swing the tip of the bamboo to and fro. The bamboo swung in wider and wider arcs over the stream getting nearer and nearer to the tip of the withered branch of the tree on the island. It was very dangerous and Nandriya felt that at any moment he might slip from the wildly swaying bamboo, fall into the swiftly-moving stream and get drowned. But this fate did not befall him and

when the swaying tip came close to the withered branch, he seized it.

His plan was to untie the bamboo from his waist and tie it to the withered branch so that it would form a slender, but not unsafe, bridge to the other bank. But he found that he had misjudged the distance. The bamboo was about a metre short. This gap was now covered by the length of his own body above the waist. If he untied the bamboo by biting off the knots, the tip would spring back. He wondered whether he should start all over again. Just then he heard an uproar on the island. The archers had started the hunt without waiting for daylight. He realised that there was no other solution but to let his own body be used as part of the bridge.

He called out softly to the monkeys, who had assembled below, to climb up and cross over to the other bank. They were a large number and after a while the strain began to tell. Nandriya was no longer young. He was quite old and his heart was weak. Suddenly he felt a stabbing pain near his heart and knew that if anyone stepped on him now, he would die. But there was still one monkey left, a mother with two babies who were clinging to it in great fright. Nandriya gritted his teeth, and giving no sign that he was in great pain, he whispered to the mother to hurry.

As soon as the monkey reached the tree on the opposite bank safely, disaster struck. The knots, with which the bamboo was tied to the tree on the other bank, had been under a strain all the time because of the load of monkey after monkey crossing over. They gave way suddenly and the unexpected jolt made Nandriya, who was already about to faint, let go his hold and fall to the ground.

Unnoticed, the King had crept near quite a while back, and had been watching all this. Because of the faint moonlight, he could not see clearly, but only perceived that the monkeys were leaving the island. Since this suited him, he was content to watch. When Nandriya fell down with the bamboo still attached to his waist, the King understood for the first time what exactly had happened. He rushed to the spot where Nandriya lay and attended on him with great gentleness and care. But he could see that Nandriya was dying.

"O great-hearted monkey!" cried the King. "Even among men I have never seen or heard of anyone who sacrificed himself for others. If you have any last wish, I will grant it if it is in my power."

In a very faint voice Nandriya replied, "I love my troop dearly. Do not let it come to grief." With these words he passed away.

The King was so moved by all that he had seen that he decided that he would not take possession of the island but would give it back to the monkeys. When dawn broke, he asked his soldiers to make a strong bamboo bridge between the island and the bank. The monkeys on the other side stood watching, but would not cross over at first, being uncertain of what exactly were the King's intentions. But when he made preparations for the funeral of their leader, they understood that the King was mourning Nandriya's loss as keenly as they were themselves. So they trooped back and paid their last homage to Nandriya.

After the funeral, the King erected a small memorial pillar on the island. At its base he placed a tablet which stated the King's orders that no man should trespass on the island which had been made a sanctuary for the troop. The King only took away a few mangoes which he wanted to plant in his palace garden. They would yield sweet fruit and remind him, as long as he lived, of the sacrifice of the noble-hearted Nandriya.

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